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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RIYADH 001035

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UNFPA, UNGA  
SUBJECT: SAUDI KING ON MADRID INTER-FAITH CONFERENCE

REF: USUN 555

Classified By: Ambassador Ford Fraker for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: In a June 29 meeting with Senator John Kerry (D-MA) in Jeddah, Saudi King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Al Saud elaborated on furthering global religious tolerance and combating extremism through the Inter-Faith Dialogue he launched, where the next step will be a multi-faith conference, including Christian, Jewish and Muslim representatives, scheduled for July 16 in Madrid. The King's comments reflected a new position for the SAG in its handling of other religions and demonstrating a willingness to accept other religions as faiths that are equal to Islam. END SUMMARY.

THREE GREAT COMMON RELIGIONS  
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¶2. (C) In his meeting with Sen. Kerry, accompanied by the Ambassador and DCM, a healthy-looking King Abdullah gave an animated and energetic overview of the upcoming multi-faith conference scheduled for July 16 in Madrid. The King explained this is part of the Inter-Faith Dialogue he launched earlier in 2008. There had been an Islamic conference in Mecca earlier in June, where Islamic clerics of various sects were represented. The purpose was to achieve a unity of faith to do away with animosities that stemmed from the different interpretations of Islam. Abdullah expressed satisfaction that this Islamic conference had been a success.

¶3. (C) The next step for the Inter-Faith Dialogue would be a multi-faith conference to include the "three great" monotheistic religions - Judaism, Islam, and Christianity. Abdullah stated he had previously discussed this type of conference with Pope Benedict and former British Prime Minister Tony Blair. He added his scheduled 30 minute Papal meeting stretched into 90 as they discussed the idea of the Inter-faith Dialogue. Spain was chosen as the location for the upcoming multi-faith conference because Spain had previously been home to Jews, Christians and Muslims where

they had all lived in peace, so what better symbolic location than the Iberian peninsula to host such a gathering. Abdullah added he had consulted with Spanish King Juan Carlos who had been enthusiastic about having this conference in Madrid.

¶4. (C) Abdullah continued that the Torah, Koran and the Gospel all preach the same message from the same God. All were suitable for teaching moral values and to stop what Abdullah described as "the breakdown of the family." Throughout this discussion, Abdullah was visibly excited about this upcoming multi-faith conference in Madrid and was eagerly awaiting participating in it.

#### WAY TO BEAT EXTREMISM

¶5. (C) COMMENT. The upcoming multi-faith Madrid conference sponsored by Saudi Arabia is extremely significant. Saudi Arabia has long been known for its religious intolerance and xenophobic attitude towards outsiders. It is remarkable that King Abdullah, the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, is now equating Judaism and Christianity with Islam.

¶6. (C) Abdullah believes Islam has been hijacked by violent, radical extremists, who have threatned Saudi Arabia itself. A reconciliation movement such as King Abdullah's Inter-Faith Dialogue is a viable venue to counter this extremism. That Saudi Arabia is the sponsor of this Dialogue, and is actually getting traction from other Muslims, including the Saudi

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religious establishment, is even more telling. This Inter-Faith Dialogue could be a method to counter the threat of extremist terrorist ideology and help eliminate future generations of turning to religious violence. END COMMENT.  
FRAKER